Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*

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1. Introduction

Dan Zahavi's *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* is an elaboration of the author's phenomenological account of selfhood, the latest longer work in a series of publications on the topic. The focus of this monograph is on the relation between the self and the other. Zahavi defends the multidimensional model of the self and argues that the minimal self, the most basic form of self that all subjective creatures share, is presocial. However, there are also other dimensions of the self that are formed through social means. *Self and Other* is an exploration of the interconnection between the social and the presocial aspects of selfhood via an extended investigation of the phenomenon of empathy. It addresses the question whether understanding the self to be a presocial and first-personal phenomenon at the most basic level allows for a proper account of both intersubjectivity and the social nature of humans. Drawing upon insights provided by the phenomenological accounts of Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Max Scheler, and Alfred Schutz, Zahavi defends the notion of a minimal self from the critique that it is overly Cartesian. He argues that since the basic form of empathy, which is necessary for developing any social dimension of selfhood, entails the preservation of self-other differentiation, the first-personal experiential self must rather be regarded as a prerequisite for a satisfactory account of intersubjectivity and sociability. The monograph includes a critical assessment of a wide range of contemporary works on the self, empathy, and shame, and it engages with relevant recent discoveries in

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the cognitive sciences, bringing together research in phenomenology, analytical philosophy of mind, psychology, and neuroscience. One of its central goals is to show that the phenomenological method is not outdated and can provide important insights that are of use to contemporary research on selfhood and sociability.

2. Subjectivity and selfhood

The book is divided thematically into three parts, the last of which suggests some future directions for research. I will focus on the two more substantial parts in this review: the chapters on the self and the chapters on empathy. The first section of the book is dedicated to explaining what the minimal or experiential self is and why one should adopt the view that it exists. Following the phenomenological tradition, Zahavi argues that every instance of experience involves an inherent aspect of "mine-ness" or "for-me-ness" and this constitutes a minimal self. A state is a conscious state in virtue of making a difference to *what it is like for me*.

This, Zahavi admits, has led many of his readers to believe that the experiential self or experiential subjectivity (Zahavi uses the two terms interchangeably) must have a specific feel to it or that there is such a thing as "I-qualia". It has been seen as a problem for a phenomenological account of minimal self. In the current monograph Zahavi rejects a critique along these lines by insisting that instead of thinking of the mine-ness of experience as something on a par with the scent of freshly crushed mint leaves, we should understand it as the manner or the *how* of experiencing. My experiences do not have mine-ness as their content, but it is a part of their *structure* that I have them minely. What really distinguishes my experiential life from that of others' is not any content of my experience but the way it is given to me, namely, that it is given "first-personally".

This clarification of Zahavi's view makes it look quite similar to accounts that take the mine-ness of experience to be a *mere* metaphysical relation rather than something experiential. The divergence of the two sorts of views could have been presented with more clarity and detail. What Zahavi has in mind might perhaps be better understood when we consider what is lost in schizophrenia. Following a tradition that started with John Campbell's paper (1999) (cited in Zahavi 2014), Zahavi points out that there are two kinds of mine-ness in experience: the recognition of an experience belonging to one's own mental life and the recognition of oneself as the author of a thought. Zahavi discusses schizophrenia in order to show that thought-insertion pathology does not involve the loss of ownership, but rather the loss of the experience of authorship. Indeed, the fact that the person retains the first kind of mine-ness is precisely the reason why a conflict can arise

within him. He feels that the alien thoughts are not 'over there' but in *his* mental life and he is disturbed by it.

Though Zahavi does not take this step, the same example could be used to show that a merely metaphysical account of the minimal self is misleading. If mine-ness as ownership would not make a difference in experience at all, it would follow that no conflict could arise in the schizophrenia case and that a person could not suffer from any such form of schizophrenia. Zahavi argues that the subjectivity or ownership of experience amounts to a minimal form of self, and thus the *self* makes an experiential difference. If one reads Zahavi's text in this way, there may seem to be a tension in his account—namely, that for a reader coming from the analytic tradition like myself, it may remain vague as to *how* the self can make an experiential difference without becoming an object of experience; how something can be experienced without being *what* is experienced. I presume that the phenomenological answer would be that first-personal character of experience is a part of the structure of that experience, much like memory, perception, and imagination are structurally distinct. It does seem plausible that recollecting an object makes a difference to my experience relative to perceiving an object, for instance. Yet, recollection is not an object of active experience.

Zahavi is explicit about the limitations of the phenomenological account of self. The minimal self does not come close to capturing the complex phenomenon of selfhood. Instead, Zahavi wants to demonstrate the complexity of the phenomenon and show that many of the accounts that have been seen as competing definitions of the self are actually accounts of different dimensions of selfhood. One of the central themes for the rest of the book is the investigation of the relation between the social and non-social aspects of selfhood.

3. Empathy

In part II, Zahavi investigates the rich and controversial research in empathy. Although interest in empathy is growing in many fields including philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience, there is a long on-going debate concerning what exactly empathy is and consensus does not seem forthcoming. 'Empathy' is a term used to mean different things in different contexts in scientific and philosophical inquiry, as well as in everyday life. This has started a debate over which process(es) qualify as empathy proper. As with selfhood, Zahavi's aim is not to contribute to the terminological dispute by limiting empathy to a single phenomenon. Nor is his goal to provide an account that covers the full range of interpersonal understanding. Instead, his aim is to demonstrate that the phenomenological investigations of empathy can provide insights that are relevant to contemporary research as well as to

show that acceptance of the first-personal character of experience as an essential aspect of selfhood does not preclude the possibility of a satisfactory account of intersubjectivity. The core of part II is chapter 10, in which Zahavi introduces and interprets several phenomenological approaches to empathy. He argues that despite important differences, there is enough overlap between the theories presented to talk about something like a phenomenological account of empathy. This phenomenological account emphasizes the importance of a basic level of empathy, which has not been given much attention in today's research. Contemporary study of empathy has mainly focused upon the processes that allow us both to explain and predict others' behaviour and to act socially. The phenomenological account, on the other hand, is also concerned with explaining how we come to experience others as minded beings, or how we come to have *basic empathy*. One of the central insights that the phenomenological account provides is an emphasis on the asymmetry between the way one's own experiences are given to one and the way one can be acquainted with the experiences of another. Whereas the experience of empathy is given to one first-personally, the experiences that one empathizes with are not. Thus, in order to preserve the otherness of the other and not reduce the other to oneself, the first-personal character of the minimal self is essential. Indeed, the experiential dimension of selfhood is presupposed by phenomenological empathy.

In addition to the phenomenological theory of basic empathy, Zahavi also presents and defends a phenomenological account of *empathy* which is insightful, he argues, in that it brings into light a pre-reflective aspect of empathy that does not involve any form of inference, perspective taking, nor projection. Indeed, most theories of empathy in philosophy assume that empathizing involves some form of conscious effort and mindreading. Furthermore, the phenomenological form of empathy does not entail the sharing or matching of emotions. On this account, for one to be empathically acquainted with a friend's love or frustration, does not mean to share those emotions. In contemporary research—with the exception of the term 'cognitive empathy' sometimes used in psychology (see e.g. Smith 2009)—it is normally assumed that empathy includes both a cognitive aspect and an *emotional or experiential aspect* and is treated as an ability not just to grasp but also to *catch* another's experience (see e.g. Coplan 2011; De Vignemont and Singer 2006; Goldie 2000; Snow 2000). On the one hand, Zahavi wants to avoid positing the catching condition, but on the other hand, he also wants to retain the idea that empathy is experiential. He argues that cases where we react with fear when seeing that the other is angry should count as instances of empathy and that mainstream accounts that place such reactions on a par with cases of mindreading followed by an emotional reaction are misguided

(149). However, on the phenomenological account, it is not the emotional reaction itself that makes it a case of empathy but the direct face-to-face acquaintance with another's emotion. What is characteristic of empathy, in other words, is only the *way* another's mind is given to me—that I am *seeing* rather than imagining it. Thus, we can also empathise with beliefs, intentions and other cognitive states (151). So, what Zahavi means when he says that empathy is experiential is very different from what is usually meant in empathy research. According to both treatments, the experiential aspect is meant to set empathy apart from mindreading but in very different ways. Given the mainstream view, to empathise is to experience what others experience. Zahavi, however, speaks of empathy as a non-inferential ability to attribute mental states to others. As such, his account of empathy fits seamlessly into the debate about how we attribute mental states to other agents while it fits into the contemporary debates about the nature and function of empathy in a way that seems much more forced.

I am very sympathetic towards Zahavi's ambition to defend the multidimensional nature of selfhood and interpersonal understanding. I find this direction particularly important in the context of philosophical research on empathy, where the focus has been on providing a definition of *real* empathy, while very little justification for preferring any given definition has been provided. This has created a misleading impression that most accounts of empathy are incompatible and compete with each other, prohibiting any real collaboration between philosophers who work in this field. I agree with Zahavi in that recognizing the complexity and layered nature of our sociality is essential to empathy and social cognition research. However, some accounts of empathy or self surely may still compete with each other. Zahavi differentiates between at least two levels of empathy: basic empathy and pre-reflective empathy (169), but he refers to many phenomena that are often called 'empathy' in contemporary empathy research as mere forms of interpersonal understanding but never as empathy. I believe that Zahavi's account would have gained in both clarity and insightfulness if he had made it clearer what composes the conflict between any two accounts of selfhood or empathy and what makes something a case of empathy as opposed to a form of interpersonal understanding that is not empathy. From what is said in the book, I gather that in Zahavi's view empathy always requires face-to-face acquaintance with the target person, while other forms of interpersonal understanding do not. This, however, calls for a major revision of terminology in the field and a rethinking of what empathy is. Thus, while Zahavi wishes to avoid entering the debate about what the term 'empathy' means, he nevertheless seems to have entered it.

4. Conclusion

The book addresses a wide range of objections to anti-realism about the self in general as well as to the notion of a minimal self and its importance for understanding intersubjectivity. Zahavi demonstrates that his account of the experiential self can avoid many of the problems that have led researchers to abandon the notion of self altogether, and he does so by intertwining the phenomenological approach with findings in contemporary scientific research. The fruits of extensive research in the field are presented, and an impressive number of relevant theories and research results are introduced. As such, the book serves as a comprehensive, albeit somewhat hectic, guide to the discussed themes, and as an introductory text to the field. However, its richness comes with a price, and the wide variety of views presented is so vast that it distracts the reader, making it often needlessly hard to follow the main argument. Additionally, some connections between presented theories are drawn rather loosely and some theories that are touched upon do not directly contribute to the arguments. This results in the book coming across as somewhat unfocused. The book would have benefited from some more space spent clarifying Zahavi's own positions in a way that is more proportional to the lengthy discussion of other views.

These remarks aside, Zahavi's *Self and Other* contains an extensive overview of the issues concerning the sociality of the self and brings to light the ways that phenomenological methods can enrich the current philosophical and scientific research of selfhood and empathy. In contrast to the majority of philosophical work on these subjects, Zahavi stresses the need to recognize the layered nature of these phenomena, which I see as a great methodological virtue of his work. We have, for a long time, also lacked a much needed comprehensive overview of the relations between different accounts of empathy which the book provides. The text has much worth both as an original piece of philosophy and as a piece of secondary literature for those who want to familiarize themselves with research on selfhood and intersubjectivity.

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